

A Letter In Support of HB 6800  
March 8, 2023

I write to ask my legislators to support HB 6800, "An Act Concerning Electronic Book and Digital Audiobook Licensing."

In my role as a public library director in Connecticut for the past 18 years, it has been my duty to serve as a responsible steward of local tax dollars, including those spent on circulating library materials. Unfortunately, the unfair terms and astronomical pricing offered by most publishers for ebooks and digital audiobooks have made it nearly impossible to perform that aspect of my job.

Connecticut's taxpayers expect their public libraries to be able to provide a wealth of materials, in a variety of formats, for shared use by everyone in their community. This model of equitable access has been in place for nearly two centuries. However, when ebooks and other digital materials came on the scene, many publishers decided to abandon their longstanding practice of offering books at a wholesale discount and instead started gouging libraries, sometimes charging five times as much for a digital copy of a book than we would pay for a hardcover copy. To make matters worse, digital items often "expire" after a set period of time or a set number of loans, requiring libraries to re-purchase them (and at huge markups). This is not sustainable, and it has resulted in a scarcity of digital materials for library patrons, many of whom rely on digital access due to disabilities or transportation issues.

During the pandemic, when library buildings were closed to the public, demand for digital/downloadable materials skyrocketed, and libraries did their best to meet that need. These materials continue to be in high demand, but because libraries cannot afford to buy them, patrons can expect to wait many months, even sometimes more than a year, to have access to the few copies that are available.

Right now, inflation is extremely high, and we are projected to enter a recession later this year. If our experience during the "Great Recession" a decade and a half ago is any indication, use of public libraries will spike as people are forced to reduce their discretionary spending. Taxpayers will rely more heavily on the shared resources of libraries for education and enrichment. But will libraries actually be able to afford those resources? With only \$4.79 per capita to spend on library materials here in Middletown, I am not sure we will. In times like these, with so many people in need of resources, that is a shame.

Please support HB 6800, which will require fair terms and pricing for digital library materials. Feel free to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,  
Ramona A. Burkey  
Director of the Russell Library, and Middletown resident